

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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### A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

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#### CHAPTER VI.

THERE are two diametrically opposed points of view from which London life is regarded by those who know of it only by hearsay—the one, from which life in the metropolis is contemplated with somewhat awestruck and dubious eyes as necessarily involving a continuous vortex of society and dissipation; the other, which recognises no so-called society life except during the eight or ten weeks of high pressure known as the season. Both these points of view are essentially false. In no place is it possible to lead a more completely hermit-like life than in London; in no place is it possible to lead a simpler and more hard-working life. On the other hand, that feverish access of stir and movement which makes the months of May and June stand out and focus, so to speak, the attention of onlookers, is only an acceleration and accentuation of the life which is lived in certain strata of the London world for eight or nine months in the year. A large proportion of the intellectual work of the world is done in London; to be in society is a great assistance to the intellectual worker of to-day on his road to material prosperity; consequently a large section of "society" is of necessity in London from October to July; and, since people must have some occupation, even out of the season, social life, in a somewhat lower key indeed than the pitch of the season, but on the same artificial foundations, goes on undisturbed, gathering about

it, as any institution will do, a crowd of that unattached host of idlers, male and female, whose movements are dictated solely by their own pleasure—or their own weariness.

It was the March of one of the last of the eighties. A wild March wind was taking the most radical liberties with the aristocratic neighbourhood of Grosvenor Place, racing and tearing and shrieking down the chimneys with a total absence of the respect due to wealth. If it could have got in at one in particular of the many drawing-room windows at which it rushed so vigorously, it might have swept round the room and out again with a whoop of amusement. For the room contained some twelve ladies of varying ages and demeanours, and, with perhaps one or two exceptions, each lady was talking at the top of her speed—which, in some cases, was very considerable—and of her voice—which as a rule was penetrating. Every speaker was apparently addressing the same elderly and placid lady, who sat comfortably back in an arm-chair, and made no attempt to listen to any one. Perhaps she recognised the futility of such a course.

The elderly and placid lady was the mistress of the very handsomely and fashionably furnished drawing-room and of the house to which it belonged. Her dress bore traces—so near to vanishing point that their actual presence had something a little ludicrous about it—of the last lingering stage of widow's mourning. Her name was Pomeroy, Mrs. Robert Pomeroy, and she was presiding over the ladies' committee for a charity bazaar.

Fashionable charities and their frequent concomitant, the fashionable bazaars, which have superseded the fashionable private

theatricals of some years ago, are generally and perhaps uncharitably supposed by a certain class of cynical unfashionables to have their motive power in a feminine love of excitement and desire for conspicuousness. Perhaps there is another aspect under which they may present themselves; namely, as a proof that not even a long course of society life can destroy the heaven-sent instinct for work, even though the circumstances under which it struggles may render it so mere a travesty of the real thing. From this point of view, when the promoter of a charitable folly is a middle-aged woman, who puts into the business an almost painfully earnest enthusiasm which might have been so useful if she had only known more of any life outside her own narrow round, the situation is not without its pathos. But when, as in the present instance, a long-established, self-reliant, and venerable philanthropic institution is suddenly "discovered," taken up, and patronised by such a woman as the secretary and treasurer of the present committee; a woman who would have been empty-headed and vociferous in any sphere, and who had been moulded by circumstances into a pronounced specimen of a certain type of fashionable woman, dashing, loud, essentially unsympathetic; the position, in the incongruities and discrepancies involved, becomes wholly humorous.

Mrs. Ralph Halse, in virtue of her office as secretary and treasurer, was sitting at Mrs. Pomeroy's right hand; by her conception as to the duties of her office seemed to be limited to a sense that it behoved her never for a single instant to leave off addressing the chair, and this duty she fulfilled with a conscientious energy worthy of the highest praise. She had "discovered" the well-known and well-to-do institution before alluded to about a month earlier.

"Such a capital time of year, you know, when one has nothing to do and can attend to things thoroughly!" she had explained to her friends. She had determined that "something must be done," as she had rather vaguely phrased it, and she had applied herself exuberantly and forthwith to the organisation of a bazaar. The season was Lent; philanthropy was the fashion; Mrs. Halse's scheme became the pet hobby of the moment, and the ladies' committee was selected exclusively from among women well known in society.

The committee was tremendously in earnest; nobody could listen to it and

doubt that fact for a moment. At the same time a listener would have found some difficulty in determining what was the particular point which had evoked such enthusiasm, because, as has been said, the members were all talking at once. Their eloquence was checked at last, not, as might have been the case with a cold-blooded male committee, by a few short and pithy words from the gently smiling president, but by the appearance of five o'clock tea. The torrent of declamatory enthusiasm thereupon subsided, quenched in the individual consciousness that took possession of each lady that she was "dying for her tea," and had "really been working like a slave." The committee broke up with charming informality into low-toned duets and trios. Even Mrs. Ralph Halse ceased to address the chair, though she could not cease to express her views on the vital point which had roused the committee to a state bordering on frenzy; she turned to her nearest neighbour. Mrs. Halse was a tall woman, good-looking in a well-developed, highly coloured style, and appearing younger than her thirty-eight years. She was dressed from head to foot in grey, and the delicate sobriety of her attire was oddly out of keeping with her florid personality. As a matter of fact the hobby which had preceded the present all-absorbing idea of the bazaar in her mind—Mrs. Halse was a woman of hobbies—had been ritualism of an advanced type; perhaps some of the fervour with which her latest interest had been embraced was due to a certain sense of flatness in its predecessor; but be that as it may, her present very fashionable attire represented her idea of Lenten mourning.

"I don't see myself how there can be two opinions on the subject," she said. Mrs. Ralph Halse very seldom did see how there could be two opinions on a subject on which her own views were decided. "Fancy dress is a distinct feature, and of course there must be more effect and more variety when each woman is dressed as suits her best, than when there is any attempt at uniform. You agree with me, Lady Bracondale, I'm sure?"

The woman she addressed was of the pronounced elderly aristocratic type, tall and thin, aquiline-nosed and sallow of complexion. She seemed to be altogether superior to enthusiasm of any kind, and her manner was of that unreal kind of dignity and chilling suavity, in which

nothing is genuine but its slight touch of condescension.

"Fancy dress is a pretty sight," she said. "But it is perhaps a drawback that of course all the stall-holders cannot be expected to wear it." The words were spoken with an emphasis which plainly conveyed the speaker's sense that no such abrogation of dignity could by any possibility be expected of herself. "What is your own opinion, Mrs. Pomeroy?" Lady Bracondale added, turning to the chairwoman of the committee.

Mrs. Pomeroy's attention was not claimed for the moment otherwise than by her serene enjoyment of her cup of tea, which she was sipping with the air of a woman who has done, and is conscious of having done, a hard afternoon's work. Perhaps it is somewhat fatiguing to be talked to by twelve ladies all at once. Lady Bracondale's question was one which Mrs. Pomeroy rarely answered, however, even in her secret heart, so she only smiled now and shook her head thoughtfully.

"Miscellaneous fancy dress gives so much scope for individual taste, don't you think?" said Mrs. Halse.

"Of course it does, my dear Mrs. Halse. Every one can wear what they like, and that is very nice," answered Mrs. Pomeroy comfortably.

"But, on the other hand, a quiet uniform can be worn by any one," said Lady Bracondale with explanatory condescension.

"By any one, of course. So important," assented the chairwoman with bland cheerfulness. Then, as Mrs. Halse's lips parted to give vent to a flood of eloquence, she continued placidly, in her gentle, contented voice: "Mrs. Romaine is not here yet. I wonder what she will say!"

"I met her at the French Embassy last night," said Mrs. Halse, with a slightly aggressive inflection in her voice, "and she told me she meant to come if she could make time. Apparently she has not been able to!"

"Mrs. Romaine?" repeated Lady Bracondale interrogatively. "I don't think I've met her? Really, one feels quite out of the world."

There was a fine affectation of sincerity about the words which would, however, hardly have deceived the most unsophisticated hearer as to the speaker's position in society, or her own appreciation of it. Lady Bracondale was distinctly a person to be known by anybody wishing to make

good a claim to be considered in society, and she was loftily conscious of the fact. She had only just returned to town from Bracondale, where she had been spending the last two months.

"Romaine?" she repeated. "Mrs. Romaine! Ah, yes! To be sure! The name is familiar to me. I thought it was. There was a little woman, years ago, that we met on the Continent. Her husband—dear me, now, what was it! Ah, yes! Her husband failed or—no, of course! I recollect! He was a swindler of some sort. Of course, one never met her again!"

"This Mrs. Romaine is the same, Ralph says," said Mrs. Halse, sipping her tea. "At least, her husband was William Romaine, who was the moving spirit in a big bank swindle—and a lot of other things, I believe—years ago. She turned up about two months ago, and took a house in Chelsea. Lots of money, apparently. She has a grown-up son—he would be grown-up, of course—who is going to the bar."

"But, dear me!" said Lady Bracondale with freezing stateliness, "does she propose to go into society? It was a most scandalous affair, my dear Mrs. Pomeroy, as far as I remember. A connection of Lord Bracondale's lost some money, I recollect; and I think the man—Romaine, I mean, of course—poisoned himself or something. We were at Nice when it happened. He committed suicide there, and it was most unpleasant! She can't expect one to know her!"

Eighteen years had passed since the same woman had expressed herself as eager to make the acquaintance of "the man," and the haze which had wrapped itself in her mind about the tragedy which had frustrated her desire in that direction, was not the only outcome for her of the passing of those years. Lady Bracondale had been Lady Henry Birkett eighteen years ago, the wife of the youngest son of the Earl of Bracondale; poor, and with a somewhat perfunctorily yielded position. She and her husband had been, moreover, a cheery, easy-tempered pair, living chiefly on the Continent, and getting a good deal of pleasure out of life. A series of deaths had given to Lord Henry Birkett the family title and the family lands; and with his accession to wealth, importance, and responsibilities, his wife's whole personality had gradually seemed to become transformed. Her satisfaction in her new dignities took the

form of living rigidly up to what she considered their obligations. Laxity, frivolity of any kind, seemed to her to abrogate from the importance of her position. She ranged herself on the side of strict decorum and respectability, and became more precise than the precisians. Her husband at the same time developed talents latent in his obscurity, and became a prominent politician; and the ultra-correct and exclusive Lady Bracondale was now in truth a power in society.

Consequently, the tone in which she disposed of the intruder, who had ventured unauthorised to obtain recognition during her absence, was crushing and conclusive. But Mrs. Pomeroy's individuality was of too soft a consistency to allow of her being crushed; and she replied placidly, and with unconscious practicality.

"People do know her, dear Lady Bracondale," she said. "She had some friends among really nice people to begin with, and every one has called on her. I really don't know how it has happened, but it is years and years ago, you know, and she really is a delightful little woman. Quite wrapped up in her boy!"

Almost before the words were well uttered, before Lady Bracondale could translate into speech the aristocratic disapproval written stiffly on her face, the door was flung open, and the footman announced "Mrs. Romaine!"

#### CHAPTER VII.

EIGHTEEN years lay between the events which Lady Bracondale recalled so hazily and the Mrs. Romaine who crossed the threshold of Mrs. Pomeroy's drawing-room as the footman spoke her name. Those eighteen years had changed her at once curiously more and curiously less than the years between six-and-twenty and four-and-forty usually change a woman. She looked at the first glance very little older than she had done eighteen years ago; younger, indeed, than she had looked during those early days of her widowhood. Such changes as time had made in her appearance seemed mainly due to the immense difference in the styles of dress now obtaining. The dainty colouring, the cut of her frock, the pose of her bonnet, the arrangement of her hair, with its fluffy curls, all seemed to accentuate her prettiness and to bring out the youthfulness which a little woman without strongly marked features may keep for so long. The fluffy hair was a red-brown now, in-

stead of a pale yellow, and the change was becoming, although it helped greatly, though very subtly, to alter the character of her face. The outline of her features was perhaps a trifle sharper than it had been, and there were sundry lines about the mouth and eyes when it was in repose. But these were obliterated, as a rule, by a characteristic to which all the minor changes in her seemed to have more or less direct reference; a characteristic which seemed to make the very similarity between the woman of to-day and the woman of eighteen years before seem unreal; the singular brightness and vivacity of her expression. Her features were animated, eager, almost restless; her gestures and movements were alert and quick; her voice, as she spoke to an acquaintance here and there, as she moved up Mrs. Pomeroy's drawing-room, was brisk and laughing. Her dress and demeanour were the dress and demeanour of the day to the subtlest shade; she had been a typical woman of the world eighteen years before; she was a typical woman of the world now. But in the old days the personality of the woman had been dominated by and merged in the type. Now the type seemed to be penetrated by something from within, which was not to be wholly suppressed.

She came quickly down the long drawing-room, smiling and nodding as she came, and greeted Mrs. Pomeroy with a little exaggerated gesture of despair and apology.

"Have you really finished?" she cried. "Is everything settled? How shocking of me!" Then, as she shook hands with Mrs. Halse, she added, with a sweetness of tone which seemed to cover an underlying tendency which was not sweet: "However, we have such a host in our secretary that really one voice more or less makes very little difference."

"Well, really, I don't know that we have settled anything!" said Mrs. Pomeroy. "We have talked things over, you know. It is such a mistake to be in a hurry! Don't you think so?"

"I've not a doubt of it," was the answer, given with a laugh. "My dear Mrs. Pomeroy, I have been in a hurry for the last six weeks, and it's a frightful state of things. You've had a capital meeting, though. Why, I believe I am actually the only defaulter!"

The hard blue eyes were moving rapidly over the room as Mrs. Romaine spoke; there was an eager comprehensive glance in



them as though the survey taken was in some sense a survey of material or—at one instant—of a battle-ground; and it gave a certain unreality to their carelessness.

"The only defaulter. Yes," agreed Mrs. Pomeroy comfortably. "And now, Mrs. Romaine, you must let me introduce you to a new member of our committee; quite an acquisition! Why, where—oh!" and serenely oblivious of the stony stare with which Lady Bracondale, a few paces off, was regarding the opposite wall of the room just over the new-comer's bonnet, Mrs. Pomeroy, with her kind fat hand on Mrs. Romaine's arm, approached the exclusive acquisition. "Let me introduce Mrs. Romaine, dear Lady Bracondale!" she said with unimpaired placidity.

The stony stare was lowered an inch or two until it was about on a level with Mrs. Romaine's eyebrows, and Lady Bracondale bowed icily; but at the same moment Mrs. Romaine held out her hand with a graceful little exclamation of surprise. It was not genuine, though it sounded so; those keen, quick blue eyes had seen Lady Bracondale and recognised her in the course of their owner's progress up the room, and had observed her withdrawal of herself those two or three paces from Mrs. Pomeroy's vicinity; and it was as they rested for an instant only on her in their subsequent survey of the room that that subtle change suggestive of a sense of coming battle had come to them. They looked full into Lady Bracondale's face now with a smiling ease, which was just touched with a suggestion of pleasure in the meeting.

"I hardly know whether we require an introduction," said Mrs. Romaine; she spoke with cordiality which was just sufficiently careless to be thoroughly "good form." "It is so many years since we met, though, that perhaps our former acquaintanceship must be considered to have died a natural death. I am very pleased that it should have a resurrection!"

She finished with a little light laugh, and Lady Bracondale found, almost to her own surprise, that they were shaking hands. If she had been able to analyse cause and effect—which she was not—she would have known that it was that carelessness in Mrs. Romaine's manner that influenced her. A powerful prompter to a freezing demeanour is withdrawn when the other party is obviously insensible to cold.

"It is really too bad of me to be so

late!" continued Mrs. Romaine, proceeding to pass over their past acquaintance as a half forgotten recollection to which they were both indifferent, and taking up matters as they stood with the easy unconcern and casual conversationalism of a society woman. "At least it would be if my time was my own just now. But as a matter of fact my sole *raison d'être* for the moment is the getting ready of our little place for my boy. I ought to have shut myself up with carpenters and upholsterers until it was done! I assure you I can't even dine out without a guilty feeling that I ought to be seeing after something or other connected with chairs and tables!"

She finished with a laugh about which there was a touch of artificiality, as there had been about her tone as she alluded to her "boy." Perhaps the only thoroughly genuine point about her, at that moment, was a certain intent watchfulness, strongly repressed, in the eyes with which she met Lady Bracondale's gorgon-like stare; and something about the spirited pose of her head and the lines of her face, always recalling, vaguely and indefinitely, that idea of single combat. Lady Bracondale, however, was not a judge of artificiality, and Mrs. Romaine's manner, with its perfect assurance and careless assumption of a position and a footing in society, affected her in spite of herself. The stony stare relaxed perceptibly as she said, stiffly enough, but with condescending interest:

"You are expecting your son in town?"

"I am expecting him every day, I am delighted to say!" answered Mrs. Romaine, with a little conventional gush of superficial enthusiasm. "Really, you have no idea how forlorn I am without him! We are quite absurdly devoted to one another, as I often tell him, stupid fellow. But I always think—don't you?—that a man is much better out of the way during the agonies of furnishing, so I insisted on his making a little tour while I plunged into the fray. He was very anxious to help of course, dear fellow. But I told him frankly that he would be more hindrance than help, and packed him off—and made a great baby of myself when he was gone. Of course I have had to console myself by making our little place as perfect as possible, as a surprise for him! You know how these things grow. One little surprise after another comes into one's head, and one excuses oneself for

one's extravagance when it's for one's boy."

"Are you thinking of settling in London?" enquired Lady Bracondale.

She was unbending moment by moment in direct contradiction of her preconceived determination. Mrs. Romaine was so bright and so unconscious. She ran off her pretty little maternal platitudes with such careless confidence, that iciness on Lady Bracondale's part would have assumed a futile and even ridiculous appearance.

"Yes!" was the answer. "We are going to settle down a regular cosy couple. It has been our castle in the air all the time his education has been going on. He is to read for the bar, and I tell him that he will value a holiday more in another year or two, poor fellow. But I'm afraid I bore about him frightfully!" she added with another little laugh. "And it is rather hard on him, poor boy, for he really is not a bore! I think you will like him, Lady Bracondale. I remember young men always adored you!"

Lady Bracondale smiled, absolutely smiled, and said graciously—graciously for her, that is to say:

"You must bring him to see me! I should like to call upon you if you will give me your card."

Mrs. Romaine was in the act of complying—complying with smiling indifference, which was the very perfection of society manner—when Mrs. Pomeroy, evidently moved solely by the impetus of the excited group of ladies of which she was the serenely smiling centre, bore cheerfully down upon them.

"Perhaps we ought to vote about the fancy dress before we separate this afternoon," she suggested, "or shall we talk it over a little more at the next meeting? Perhaps that would be wiser. Mrs. Romaine——"

She looked invitingly at Mrs. Romaine as if for her opinion on the subject, and the invitation was responded to with that ever-ready little laugh.

"Oh, let us put it off until the next meeting," she said. "I am ashamed to say that I really must run away now. But at the next meeting I promise faithfully to be here at the beginning and stay until the very end."

Whereupon it became evident that the greater part of the committee was anxious to postpone the decision on the knotty point in question, and was conscious of

more or less pressing engagements. A general exodus ensued, Mrs. Halse alone remaining to expound her views to Mrs. Pomeroy all by herself and in a higher and more conclusive tone than before.

A neat little brougham was waiting for Mrs. Romaine. She gave the coachman the order "home" at first, and then paused and told him to go first to a famous cigar merchant's. She got into the carriage with a smiling gesture of farewell to Lady Bracondale, whose brougham passed her at the moment; but as she leant back against the cushions the smile died from her lips with singular suddenness. It left her face very intent, the eyes very bright and hard, the lips set and a little compressed. The lines about them and about her eyes showed out faintly under this new aspect of her face in spite of the eager satisfaction which was its dominant expression. The battle had evidently been fought and won and the victor was ready and braced for the next.

"That was excellent," she was saying to herself. "It couldn't have gone off better! She is very necessary, and she could have made things difficult. She meant to make things difficult! What an old cat she has grown, though!"

This last thought was a parenthesis, as it were, and had nothing to do with Mrs. Romaine's expression of countenance.

She got out at the cigar merchant's, and when she returned to her carriage there was that expression of elation about her which often attends the perpetration of a piece of extravagance. But as she was driven through the fading sunlight of the March afternoon towards Chelsea, her face settled once more into that intent reflection and satisfaction.

It was a narrow slip of a house at which she eventually got out, wedged in among much more imposing-looking mansions in the most fashionable part of Chelsea. But what it lacked in size it made up in brightness and general smartness. It had evidently been recently done up with all the latest improvements in paint, window-boxes, and fittings generally, and it presented a very attractive appearance indeed.

Mrs. Romaine let herself in with a latch-key, and went quickly across the prettily decorated hall into a room at the back of what was evidently the dining-room. She opened the door, and then stood still upon the threshold.

The light of the setting sun was stealing

in at the window, the lower half of which was filled in with Indian blinds; and as it fell in long slanting rays across the silent room, it seemed to emphasize and, at the same time, to soften and beautify an impression of waiting and of expectancy that seemed to emanate from everything that room contained. It was furnished—it was not large—as a compromise between a smoking-room and a study, and its every item, from the bookcases and the writing-table to the bronzes on the mantelpiece, was in the most approved and latest style, and of the very best kind. Every conceivable detail had evidently been thought out and attended to; the room was obviously absolutely complete and perfect—only on the writing-table something seemed lacking, and some brown paper parcels lay there waiting to be unfastened—and it had as obviously never been lived in. It was like a body without a soul.

The lingering light stole along the wall touching here and there those unused objects waiting, characterless, for that strange character which the personality of a man impresses always on the room in which he lives, and its last touch fell upon the face of the woman standing in the doorway. The artificiality of its expression was standing out in strong relief as if in half conscious, half instinctive struggle with something that lay behind, something which the aspect of that empty room had developed out of its previous intentness and excitement. With a little affected laugh, as though some one else had been present—or as though affectation were indeed second nature to her—Mrs. Romaine went up to the writing-table and began to undo the parcels lying there. They contained a very handsome set of fittings for a man's writing-table, and she arranged them in their places, clearing away the paper with scrupulous care, and with another little laugh.

"What a ridiculous woman!" she said half aloud, with just the intonation she had used in speaking to Lady Bracondale of her "little surprises" for "her boy."

"And what a spoilt fellow!"

She turned away, went out of the room, with one backward glance as she closed the door, and upstairs to the drawing-room. She had just entered the room when a thought seemed to strike her.

"How utterly ridiculous!" she said to herself. "I quite forgot to notice whether there were any letters!"

She was just crossing the room to ring

for a servant when the front door bell rang vigorously and she stopped short. With a little exclamation of surprise she went to the door and stood there listening, that she might prepare herself beforehand for the possible visitor for whom she evidently had no desire. "How tiresome!" she said to herself. "Who is it, I wonder?" She heard the parlour-maid go down the hall and open the door.

"Mrs. Romaine at home?"

With a shock and convulsion, which only the wildest leap of the heart can produce, the listening face in the drawing-room doorway, with the conventional smile which might momentarily be called for just quivering on it, half in abeyance, half in evidence, was suddenly transformed. Every trace of artificiality fell away, blotted out utterly before the swift, involuntary flash of mother love and longing with which those hard blue eyes, those pretty, superficial little features were, in that instant, transfigured. The elaborately dressed figure caught at the door-post, as any homely drudge might have done; the woman of the world, startled out of—or into—herself, forgot the world.

"It's Julian!" the white, trembling lips murmured. "Julian!"

As she spoke the word, up the stairs two steps at a time, there dashed a tall, fair-haired young man who caught her in his arms with a delighted laugh—her own laugh, but with a boyish ring of sincerity in it.

"I've taken you by surprise, mother!" he cried. "You've never opened my telegram!"

## SHORT STORIES—AND LONG.

SCRAPPY literature is one of the features of the day. Papers which consist of scraps—nothing but scraps—are becoming as the sands of the sea for multitude. Instead of half-hours with great authors people are trying half-minutes with little ones. Critics have been known to affirm that this class of periodical instead of educating debauches the public taste. Not long ago I heard an old literary hand maintain in argument that the habit of reading scrappy literature was like the habit of dram-drinking—when you had got into it you could not get out of it. He asserted that a man could read scraps until he became incapable of reading anything else; that, indeed, an

increasing number of men and women are so incapacitating themselves every day. For my part I doubt if literary taste is a thing either easily educated or debauched—if it is not a question rather of constitution than of anything else. To say that a man can get into the habit of reading any one thing until he becomes incapable of reading any other thing seems to me merely to talk at large. A man may read scrappy literature, and nothing but scrappy literature, say, for five years, perhaps—though one would think that that would be a record—but it is surely inconceivable to imagine that he would confine himself to that class of literature, say, for fifty.

Every question has two sides. If you consider, as to this question of scrappy literature, you will find that there is something to be said for and something to be said against it. It appears to me that the strongest indictment is not from the point of view of the public, but from the point of view of the author. The thing is spreading. Not our weekly papers only, but our monthly magazines are becoming things of shreds and patches. Brevity is not only the soul of wit, but with the modern editor it promises to become the all in all, the beginning and the end. The cry is: "Boil it down!" Not a bad process, perhaps, in itself. But to all things there is a limit. As regards this particular thing, one wonders where it is going to stop. We bid fair to keep on boiling down and boiling down until there is nothing left us but the lees. Take up a volume of either of the newest things in magazines—magazines which are avowedly devoted, first of all, to fiction. You will scarcely find a story in the whole of it—nothing but sketches. They may say what they please—and the air is full of sayings—about the art of writing a short story, but no man ever did live, or ever will live, who was, or who will be, capable of writing a good short story—a story as distinct from a sketch, or a study of character—in under three thousand five hundred words. Writers of fiction will tell you that they are continually in receipt of requests for a good short story under three thousand five hundred words. Anything longer promises to become a drug in the market. Talk about dancing in fetters! Comparatively, that is perfect ease.

The idea has come to us from the United States. Many people there—even some of the leading critics—appear to be under

the pleasing delusion that America has produced something new in literature at last—the short story. America certainly has done two things. It has made of the short story a sort of fetish, and—taken away the story. The American short story is everything except a story. As a rule it is charmingly written, but it tells no tale. This, instead of being considered a defect, seems to be considered a virtue. Authors have had their stories refused by conductors of high-class American periodicals—why do you suppose? Because, although excellent in all other respects, they contained too much incident. It is a fact. The American short story before all things must have no story. We, in England, have not yet got quite as far as that. We do not actually condemn incident. But we make our short stories such short stories that there is no room to introduce it.

Undoubtedly there is a demand for scrappiness in literature. Why should there not be? I see no reason why. One cannot too often insist upon the fact that we are men of many moods. What we desire to-day, we do not necessarily desire to-morrow. By all means let us have articles under one thousand words. Let us even have stories under three thousand five hundred. And, if we can, let us make them bright and entertaining—or sermons in a nutshell, if you choose. But men are like sheep. One man makes a success, other men immediately endeavour to make another, and a similar success, on exactly the same lines. Lacking capacity or courage to originate, they endeavour to make their imitation as servile as they safely can. The result of this characteristic of human nature is seen in the prevalence of the scrappy element in literature. People buy scrappy papers in such enormous quantities because there is practically little else for them to buy. One cannot but suspect that the thing is being overdone. Not improbably the next great fortune will be made by a periodical which will give no scraps, and no pictures, and nothing but lengthy articles and stories, and plenty of them. The man who first gives us the contents of two or three half-crown magazines for sixpence will make a fresh record in the way of enormous sales and world-wide popularity.

"Shilling shockers" have had something to do with the present rage for scrappiness. The sale of "Called Back" was a sort of



eye-opener to the world. Up to then publishers seem to have had no idea that money was to be made out of shilling novels. Many writers—especially the struggle-for-lifers—found the idea alluring. Raw hands imagined that it was easier to write a novel in one volume than in three. At any rate, it took less time, and required less paper. Publishers might be unwilling to risk their moneys on the larger venture, and yet be willing to take their chances on the less. So the stream of "shilling shockers" commenced to pour from the presser, which continues to flow, with scarcely diminished volume, to the present hour.

The would-be author is under a misapprehension if he supposes that it is easier to write a good novel in one volume than in three. To prove this you need only run through the heap of shilling novels which you will find on the first bookstall. You will find them hard reading, short though they are. Can one not count the good "shilling shockers" upon the fingers of one hand? Instead of being an easy thing, it is one of the most difficult things imaginable to write a good one-volume novel.

Consider the novels of the last century, what ponderous tomes they were. They seem to us to be interminable. We wonder how people ever found the time to read them. One explanation of the matter is, that then there was only one novel, where now, perhaps, there are a hundred. Fancy Richardson being paid so much per thousand words! How many words are there in "Clarissa Harlowe"? But granting that it is possible to make a novel too long, still it must be borne in mind that nine-tenths of the novels which have lived, and which will live, have had bulk as well as merit. Those novels of Thackeray's which, in the finite sense, not impossibly, will live for ever, are certainly not conspicuous for brevity. Take up a story by Charles Dickens; you hold something in your hand. Though, perhaps, it has not one line too many, "David Copperfield" is long. Wilkie Collins's novels were in no sense little ones. And how about Charles Reade? George Eliot's finest works—with the exception of "Silas Marner"—are her longest ones. Neither Charles Lever nor Anthony Trollope gave us scanty measure. You say that these writers are as extinct as the dodo? That is one of the fallacies which are current among those who do not know. Ask the

publishers; they will tell you that they would like to find some new writers who are as much alive. Two of the greatest financial successes have been made by two of the longest novels of the present generation—"John Inglesant" and "Robert Elsmere." The same thing is seen abroad. M. Zola's books are by no means short. M. Daudet's most popular books are his longest ones. Consider Gaboriau. Two French novels which have amused all the world, are of prodigious length—"Monte Cristo" and "Le Juif Errant." And which of Victor Hugo's novels is a short one? "Soll und Haben," the most popular of German novels, is anything but an unconsidered trifle. To go to Russia; "Anna Kaunina" is by no means a novelette. And, in Spain, how about the masterpiece of Don Miguel Cervantes?

Personally, I like a novel which has length. It must be a good one, as a matter of course. But, if it is a good one, I like it to be one at which I can cut and come again. One can read one of the modern productions in an hour, and forget it in half the time. The reason to me seems simple. The modern writer has no time to get into his stride; he is just beginning to feel at home when he, perforce, leaves off. I am not saying that no short stories have been written which leave an impression on the mind. I remember "Paul Ferrol," and the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. But people who can knock off little things like those are the curiosities of an age. The living masters of the art which is all the rage—the art of writing short stories and novelettes—seem to me to have only one sentence before their eyes, only one phrase in their minds—"Le style c'est l'homme." Take up a volume of short stories by an American writer; they abound. They are charmingly written, are they not? Take up a second; the writing is charming again. A third and fourth—nearly always is the writing charming. But have you got one striking, one original, idea out of any one, or out of all the lot? Has one single picture been precipitated on to the retina of your brain—a picture, the lines of which remain unblurred, and which you feel will be retained?

Take three or four what I venture to call stylists—say, W. D. Howells, Henry James, H. H. Boyesen, our own Robert Louis Stevenson. These men can write. There are pages of Howells's which, as regards music and rhythm, deserve to be

called exquisite. Henry James shows a nice appreciation of the meaning and value of words which is, in its way, unique. Boyesen's later writings are as smooth as velvet. They remind me of velvet as I read them—they are so refined, so soft; he evinces so delicate a sense of modulation. Stevenson's transparency, his clear-cut English, not one word too many, not one too few, is also in its way perfection. But—it is my unfortunate stupidity—the writings of these masters of style never seem to me to be alive. They are so anxious to keep the personal element out of their work that, like the sculptured Galatea, it lacks the miraculous thing—that miracle of miracles which we call life. I will say more. These gentlemen are best when they are shortest. When they are long they are tedious. The cause of this, again, is simple. Manner with them comes first; and only after manner, matter. I venture to affirm, and I fancy I could bring all the great masterpieces of prose fiction into evidence to prove it, that in prose fiction matter is of paramount importance. The story first of all, and then the manner—the words with which to tell it. If this is not so, if the matter, the story, is not of paramount importance, how comes it that all the greatest fictions—the fictions which are the common property of all the nations of the world—are as popular, and read almost as well, in translations as in the original? It is only the matter, the story, which can be translated. Who can adequately translate the manner, the style in which the thing first of all was told?

The men who in the present year of grace are posing as our teachers have it that the thing is all the other way. According to them, the tale is not the thing which is chiefly to be considered. The thing chiefly to be considered is the way in which the tale is told. They are unconscious, as it seems to me, of one great truth. That truth is this: The more one considers the masterpieces of fiction, the more certain it seems that the man who is capable of conceiving a fine story cannot help but tell it well. All the fine stories have been well told. When a man's whole being is permeated with the story that is in him it comes from him complete and perfect—a work of art in all its details. Reverse the process. Take a man who lacks capacity to conceive a fine story. What does he do? Some one has said that an individual steps lightly and

by accident upon the hem of a lady's skirt, and that Mr. Henry James required four hundred pages to tell us what came of it. The saying, although an exaggeration, does not lack truth. One is gradually driven to the conclusion that a stylist, a fictionist of the so-called new school is a person who entirely lacks a sense of proportion. He is so wholly devoid of the faculty of imagination, that when he does bring into the world even the most trivial incident, he cackles, and he cackles, until like the hen who has laid an egg, one begins to fear that he will never stop. To call these gentlemen realists, as some of them appear to call themselves, and to ask us to believe that they give us actual photographs of actual life is an absurdity. No avowed romancer ever dealt in more exaggeration. They make mountains out of mole-hills. Everything to them is an event. They appear incapable of conceiving a real event, so they are driven to the exaggeration of trivialities. A man can scarcely yawn without, according to these chroniclers of the very smallest of small beer, the event leaving an impress on his life. They remind me of nothing so much as those remarkable individuals in one of the plays of Molière—their affectations are so grotesque.

The world is changing before our eyes. Every day it is becoming more and more a world of miracles. And Mr. Howells tells us that all the tales are told! It is as though a blind man were to inform us that it is always night. He himself lacks the faculty to see, and he is incapable of realising that others may possess the power he lacks. Tragedies and comedies greet us on every side. No life was ever lived which did not have actual experience of both. Is a man to fill volumes with nothing but the records of puerile trivialities, and then to expect us to believe his assertion that he, and he alone, is a student of life? The thing is well enough once in a way. One may show literary dexterity upon those lines—the sort of dexterity which the conjurer shows who keeps six glass balls in the air for an hour at a time. But to persist in dealing with trivialities, and with nothing but trivialities, at the very least makes us doubtful if the person who does this thing could do anything else if he tried.

One would say nothing against writers who work upon these lines—for my part I hold that in the world of literature there is room for all things, and for all men!—

were it not that some of them go so much out of their way to attack the men who have worked, and who still are working, upon other lines. They are setting themselves up as apostles of a new revelation, one which shall be better than the old. There I, for one, join issue. It may be different—it may even be good in its way. But better? No! I hold that the masters of fiction stood in the light. We may discern faults in the work they did—what human work was ever faultless? There are men, plenty of them, who are pointing out faults in the work of Creation. But they stood in the light. They saw! Their vision was a broad one, their horizon wider than the average man's. I shall require stronger evidence than any which as yet has come my way before I shall be convinced that their work could easily be improved upon—ay, or their methods either.

There are those who tell us, both in England and America, that the short story is the highest form of literary expression; that length shows weakness; that the short story will be the fiction of the future. There I, again, join issue. With those who affirm that the lengthy novel is "played out," that readers are tired of it, that they care for it no more, one cannot argue. As has been said, these people meddle with matters of which they know nothing. The most popular novels of the past, and of the present, are long novels, just as certainly as the most popular novels of the future will be long ones too.

As for the short story being the highest form of literary expression, one consideration puts that claim out of court at once. Did you ever know a man or woman in twenty minutes, or even in a day? Did not the first impression often turn out to be the wrong one? A short story can only give us a glimpse of a man. The idea seems to be that there is a certain aspect of a man, of every man, which is the man; that it is possible to get a picture of certain moments of his life, which, to all intents and purposes, is a picture of his whole life. A person who really believes that to be the case cannot have lived, even in imagination. The wildest imaginings cannot conceive a more composite creature than a man. He is a bundle of contradictions—not merely of superficial, but of actual contradictions. No man ever knew another man. We do not know our-

selves. Those who tell us that outsiders know us better than we know ourselves talk nonsense. I can conceive of Omniscience knowing a man, in the sense of perfect knowledge. I can conceive it of nothing less than Omniscience. A man is not a consistent man, from the cradle to the grave. In the course of his one life he is several men.

Realise these facts, which are common-places; remember that it is the business of fiction to present us with pictures of men; then say in what sense the short story can be the highest form of literary expression in fiction. The voice of the people is the voice of God—there is more truth in the saying than some of the wise are willing to admit. There is cause for the popularity of the lengthy novel. There is cause, even, for the popularity of the startling story in a couple of hundred weekly numbers. It introduces us to acquaintances with whom, before we have done with them, we have a chance of making friends. We, at any rate, come to know something of them, to have some real knowledge of the sort of life they lived. It is impossible to make a friend of a character who only figures in a story of some twelve or twenty pages. They come like shadows—if they even attain to the corporeality of shadows—like shadows they depart. It took the whole of "Vanity Fair" to make us acquainted with Becky Sharpe. Who can say that she could have been adequately presented to us in a shorter story? Let that person give us a Becky Sharpe, or any presentation of character, which shall hold the imagination of the world as Becky Sharpe has held it, and holds it still, and show us how the thing is done. How many of Thackeray's characters seem to us to be actual creatures of flesh and blood! Why? Because he wrote at length, never stinted himself as to space, and so was able to give us room and opportunities to look at them all round.

I am not suggesting that the short story is a form of literary expression which is not worthy of serious consideration. I repeat that in the world of literature there is room for all things and for all men. You can put matter for thought into twenty lines—if you have a knack that way. But no man ever did put, or ever will put, into a pint bottle a gallon of wine.

I believe that we do owe one lesson to the men who, in the United States, are preaching to the world the gospel of the short

story. We have learnt from them that the short story can be made a work of art. It is an error to suppose that America was the land of its genesis. The land of its development it most certainly is. We in England are apt to think very little of a story-teller till he produces a full-sized novel.

When Mr. Kipling's short stories first took the world by storm, sapient critics said, They are full of promise, let us wait and see, before we pronounce our final judgement, if that promise is fulfilled when he gives us the inevitable novel in the orthodox three volumes. I venture to affirm that they were not only full of budding promise, they were full of ripe performance. Mr. Kipling would be a great fictionist, although he had never given us anything but his short stories. In America they would have recognised this at once; indeed, they did. There they have writers, who, by general agreement, rank among their best, who have never written anything longer than stories in some five or six thousand words. And this, I would respectfully suggest to our English critics, is as it should be. For, if one considers the matter, it seems that one must concede that although, in the literature of fiction, the greatest work has not been done, and cannot be done upon small canvases—even the painters of miniatures can be artists, and, in the colloquial sense, immortal artists, too.

#### PATIENCE.

Be patient! Easy words to speak  
While plenty fills the cup of life,  
While health brings roses to the cheek,  
And far removed are care and strife.

Falling so glibly from the tongue  
Of those—I often think of this—  
Whom suffering has never wrung,  
Who scarcely know what patience is.

Be patient! when the sufferer lies  
Prostrate beneath some fell disease,  
And longs, through torturing agonies,  
Only for one short hour of ease.

Be patient! when the weary brain  
Is racked with thought and anxious care,  
And troubles in an endless train  
Seem almost more than it can bear.

To feel the torture of delay,  
The agony of hope deferred;  
To labour still from day to day,  
The prize unwon, the prayer unheard:

And still to hope and strive and wait  
The due reward of fortune's kiss;  
This is to almost conquer fate,  
This is to learn what patience is.

Despair not! though the clouds are dark,  
And storm and danger veil the sky;  
Let faith and courage guide thy barque,  
The storm will pass, the port is nigh.

Be patient, and the tide will turn,  
Shadows will flee before the sun;  
These are the hopes that live and burn  
To light us till our work is done.

#### "ALONG THE TRACK."

##### A WESTERN SKETCH.

It was in the late spring, about nine in the morning, and the work of the day was over; the boys had ridden off to the "up" pasture to work at the irrigation ditch, and would not be at home till supper-time. I was all alone in the shanty for the rest of the day, so I thought I would take a "tie pass" and walk along the railway track to E.'s ranch, about a couple of miles off by the line, but nearly seven if you rode across the prairie.

It was very rarely we walked, but that one day riding was out of the question for me; one of the horses was lame, so the boys had had to take Rorie with them, and I knew that if I wanted to go out I should have to tramp it, but anything was better than staying alone in the shanty all by myself. So I raked out and relaid the stove, filled the kettle, and put the potatoes and beef ready for frying; locked up the dairy and "dug out," for fear tramps should take a fancy to their contents; put the lamps ready for lighting, with a box of "tandstickors" by the side; and having fortified myself for my walk with some milk and bread and meat—for we had breakfasted at six—I prepared to start. Of course, living as we did out on the prairie, I ought to have taken a six-shooter and a hunting-knife with me, but, as a matter of fact, my weapons were a thick leather strap and a walking-stick; the first being a protection against the barbed wire fences, and the second against rattlesnakes, the only two things that were at all likely to molest me on my travels.

Having made these little preparations, I pulled down all the blinds and locked the door of the shanty, our "not at home" signal out West, placed the doorkey under a stone where the boys could find it did they come home first, saw that there was a tin dipper hanging by the well in case any thirsty soul came along, and took my departure.

By this time it was half-past nine, the sun was nearly vertical in the sky, and soon would be quite so. I should have a



hot walk, but I always loved the sun and could do with any amount of it.

Of course, too, in summer we wore very little clothing, the ever faithful Jaeger, a serge skirt, and a blouse comprising my costume, whilst a shady hat and pair of gauntlet gloves were all that were required for outdoor wear.

My road lay first along the creek, now in its best green dress, which a week or two later would be exchanged for a dusty grey. All under the cotton-wood trees, flowers carpeted the ground, flowers of all colours and of every shade of colour. Great glades of vivid blue larkspur, of the kind found in English cottage gardens, fiery spikes of a sort of salvia, golden globes of sunflowers, from tiny blossoms the size of a dollar, to heavy-headed flowers many inches across. Close to the ground clusters of pink daisies grew on one stem; hundreds of small yellow flowers in shape and foliage like violets were scattered about under the trees.

It was such a glare of colouring that it quite tired the eyes to look around, and I was glad to rest them on the green of the cotton-woods and willows, their leaves quivering in the sultry noontide heat, although there was not a breath of air; and on the clear stream purling along at the bottom of the creek, and making little waterfalls and cascades for itself over the many small rocks which had been brought down from the mountains on one of the numerous occasions on which the creek boomed.

The long western winter was only just over; indeed, any day even then we might have a vagrant snowstorm; but in this wonderful country it seemed to me the flowers blossomed underneath the snow, for no sooner does it melt than every inch of the prairie that is not sand is covered with colour. But, except high up upon the mountains, there is a great dearth of pure white flowers. Perhaps, after so many months of snow, Nature thinks we like a thorough change.

All the birds seemed to be on the twitter amongst the bushes, some even hopping about on the banks of the creek, and picking up a stray waterfly here and there for lunch; the bluebird, with its entire plumage of pale azure; the blackbird, with its handsome crimson wings; nay, sometimes, if you sit still by a lonely creek in late summer at midday, you may see that wonderful product of nature, the tiny humming-bird.

No song, however, such as we are accustomed to at home comes from any of them, only a cheerful twitter as they go about their daily business like sparrows in a suburban garden after a summer rain. But there is one bird, the brown sand-tit, that can talk.

This bird has his dwelling in the sand by the creek side, and sometimes I was startled, as I lounged half asleep against a cottonwood, by a plaintive voice close by calling "Maa-ry, Maa-ry." I would look round in astonishment; who could be calling me by name so many thousands of miles away from home and my own people?

Presently I would hear the cry repeated still more sadly, and feel that the mystery must at all risks be unravelled, and on looking round would see that it came from a demure, fat brown bird. That morning the sand-tit was very busy, making free with my name in the intervals of swallowing many of the brightly coloured insects that hovered over the water, and disputing the right of lunching off a plump sand-worm with a cheeky magpie.

I am not superstitious, but I looked instinctively about for another bird of the same species, remembering the old adage:

One for sorrow, two for mirth,  
Three for a wedding, and four for a birth.

Presently I saw number two; he was close at hand, hidden away in a wild cherry-tree so full of bloom that the blossoms nearly trailed upon the top of the water.

It would surely be a fine fruit season that fall, for the plum-trees were already white, and the little, insignificant currant and gooseberry-trees were covered with flowers; and I fear my "Martha-like" mind travelled back to the shanty where, upon a top shelf, I had during the winter months accumulated several tin lard-pails, intended to contain cherry butter should the fates be propitious. The lard-pails naturally led my thoughts towards dinner, and I got up, for if I was to reach E.'s by noon it was high time I was on my way to the ranch; and I had not yet come to the track. There was no difficulty in crossing the creek; I hopped over it and up on to the other side, where our last bit of fenced-in pasture-land ended in a fire-guard and barbed wire fence. I kept a bright lookout over that pasture; it had a reputation for rattlesnakes, and I had no wish to tread upon or otherwise provoke the

creatures. However, I reached our fire-guard without seeing any.

A fire-guard sounds a very imposing thing, but it merely means about three feet of ploughed land on each side of the railway track, where the land has been settled up, ploughed by the ranchman to whom it belongs, and thus preventing the prairie-grass, which is always dry and parched, from being burnt to any great extent when it catches fire from the engine sparks, which happens very often.

Then came the barbed wire fencing, and there my strap was useful. I buckled the strands of wire closely together in the middle of two posts, and then, thanks to the strap, slipped safely under, for without it I should certainly have had my clothes torn off my back. As it was I did not escape altogether, for I rolled into a bed of prairie-louse—pardon the elegant name, I did not bestow it—and got up with my serge skirt covered with the tiny burrs of the plant; and I knew it would be months before I could brush them all out of the dress. But, I consoled myself, matters might certainly have been worse. I was now, at any rate, fairly on the track, and had taken my "tie pass," as it was called when you merely walked along for pleasure, although when you were tramping in search of work you were said to be "counting the ties."

It cannot be said that it was very pleasant walking along the track that hot May morning; it was rough and hummocky, and I frequently hit my toes against the ties, which was rather painful. Still, it was but the means to an end, and the quickest means at hand for getting to my journey's end. The track ran here through deep cuttings, there on a raised bank, and each time a train passed—and they ran pretty frequently on the Denver and Rio Grande—I had either to scramble up a cutting or down a bank to get out of the way; and as the said cutting or bank was usually composed of sand, you generally floundered helplessly about on it, and dreaded disturbing the festive rattlesnake, who loved the hot sand dearly, and also had a pleasing penchant for the warm iron rails on the line.

The vegetation along the railway was mostly of a dried up description, that is comparatively speaking, but not of the sage-bush and alkali style, as in some other states, where I have seen traps made for little birds and baited with water. Nor

was it altogether devoid of trees as in some parts of Iowa, where, I was told by a ranchman who had taken up land there, the children were kept continually at work twisting ropes of straw to replenish the stoves. The creek ran alongside the track here some little way, giving a trifling amount of shade, and even on the sand banks the coarser flowers flourished wildly. Some of the banks were, in fact, completely carpeted with flaming crimson and orange cacti; their thick, prickly leaves rendering stepping upon them anything but enjoyable, as their thorns would penetrate any boot.

In the autumn the blossoms give place to a small fruit, pear-shaped, and with rather a nice acid flavour, but I suffered agonies the first time I tasted them, the whole fruit being covered with minute prickles, too small to be seen by the naked eye; and not having been told this peculiarity, I bit vigorously into it, and it was weeks before I got the thorns out of my lips, tongue, and fingers; even now the memory of it is anything but pleasant, although the taste of the fruit itself reminded me of a tamarind. Here and there, amongst the cacti, grew huge clumps of the soap-weed, its tall, many-headed blossoms, each greeny-white blossom like an inverted Canterbury bell of the largest kind, hanging thickly together down the stalk, which was very often over four feet high, with bright green spiky leaves, that would cut your hand as with a knife, sticking out in all directions; whilst the Indian red lilies flourished everywhere, and the glossy green trails of the kilikinlc ran riot all over the ground.

I had got quite a pretty bouquet together, when the cattle-horn of an advancing train was heard, and a Pullman train, with dining-car attached, came swiftly round the corner; and as anything female "counting the ties" is an anomaly out West, I found myself the observed of all beholders. I should think all in that train put their heads out of the windows and looked after me; I suppose I looked too highly respectable to be a tramp! I on my part regarded them in an equally interested fashion, and with, alas! perhaps a little envy.

The last car on that train was a dining one, and a very pretty girl in a most becoming hat was seated at one of the windows eating pink ice-cream; and I did want some of that ice-cream so! It seemed to me ages since I had even tasted such a

thing, and what a good time that girl must be having on the cars!

For I remembered gratefully my pleasant ride to Denver, and the many kindnesses I had received. There is no such country as America for a girl travelling alone. I would go fearlessly and happily from one end to another, sure, however wild the country might be, of the utmost kindness and consideration from all. But by this time the train had swept far away, leaving only a trail of fast-blackening cinders behind it, and I had come to a long bridge across the creek and cattle-guard, and much objected to walking over it. In fact, however often I might pass it, I never got used to the thing, and dreaded it much.

It was rather a length, for in making it due allowance had to be made for the stream; not only when it ran, a silver streak through its deep sandy banks in summer, but also when it boomed, a rushing brown torrent, flush and over the same banks at other times of the year. So the rails had to be carried over the bed of the creek at some height upon wooden trestles, the ties, as the sleepers were called, being laid across these at intervals of, say, a couple of feet, and the rails, in their turn, were laid upon the ties; so that in crossing these bridges, you had to step from tie to tie, and not be frightened at the depth below, or at the sight of the cottonwood trees waving at your feet. Fortunately, however, I had timed myself well, there would not be another train for a quarter of an hour, which would give me ample time to get across. So I set off bravely, although I never liked crossing that bridge, night or day, and longing to have something to hold on by, were it only a rope. I had got nearly to the end of it, looking steadfastly in front of me and never below, when, to my horror, I heard a cattle-horn sounding, and right ahead saw an engine coming at a great pace up the track. My heart nearly stood still, my feet did quite. But there was no time to be lost. I had forgotten that it was Thursday, and this was the pay engine and car taking the men's wages to them. There was no getting out of the way where I was, nothing for it but to go on as quickly as I could, unless I "flagged" the engine, and my pride would not allow me to do that, as with quickness and nerve there was plenty of time to get out of the way.

So I hurried on sharply, still with one eye upon the advancing engine;

noticing my bunch of flowers lodging upon the top of a cottonwood tree as they fell from my nerveless hand. But I saved the time, and sunk upon a sand-bank as the engine thundered over the bridge, which shook and swayed with the speed at which it was going. I shook also like the goose that I was, and then, I am ashamed to say, having the track all to myself, did a little "weep," and felt all the better for it; although I may say I made no mention of this slight fact on recounting my adventure to the boys in the evening. How thankful I was to stand on terra firma again! The rough earth and sand of the track seemed such delightful walking, I wondered I had ever been so ungrateful as to object to it; and I walked along happily, stopping at intervals to gather some of the young shoots of the wild hops for the boys' supper; for boiled and placed upon toast with melted butter they made a substitute for asparagus which was not displeasing to the taste; and we none of us had sufficient time or water to plant a garden, so that anything in the way of green food was a treat. I also saw a rattler fast asleep in the middle of the track, but I was not going to disturb his slumbers, so gave him a wide berth, although from his size and the number of rattles on his tail he must have been an old one, and his rattle would have been a nice addition to my little store.

These brutes are very fond of the railway track, as the bright metal attracts a great deal of sun, and are often to be seen when you take a tie pass. Most people, in the interests of humanity, slay them promptly wherever found; not at all a difficult matter, as a single blow with a slight stick, if rightly given, is fatal; but I, in the interest of one small human being, preferred, when I could safely do so, not to trouble them, but to leave them respectfully alone.

By this time it was half-past eleven and fearfully hot, the rails were the colour of burnished copper in the sun, and I began to think of E.'s cool dairy and perhaps a slice of water-melon, with much satisfaction. Also I remembered that Thursday was mail day, and she always went into our little town in the morning, and would be sure to have brought our mail out with her. How one longs for letters out West, and how keenly some people have the knack of placing distant scenes and people vividly before you on

paper! Two of my home correspondents had this rare faculty; I was certain to hear from one or the other, perhaps both. And at the thought of possible letters I trotted on briskly until I caught sight of the shingled roof of E.'s shanty. This stood quite close to the track, closer than ours did, for there was a corn patch between our shanty and the rail. But theirs was rather a dangerous situation with regard to fire, the more so that the former owners of the ranch had accepted an indemnity of five hundred dollars once for all from the company, so that in the case of a fire E. and her husband could claim nothing.

But near the railway or not, I always felt my heart beat faster at the sight of that shanty, for in it dwelt the kindest neighbour and friend any girl could wish for. Not alone to myself but to all around that little woman stood as a sort of small Providence.

She had the heart of a lion in the frame of a mouse, and go when you would—at midnight, I verily believe—she would have a welcome for you, and if you were in any trouble the quickest and truest sympathy was added to it. When I reached the gate I gave a prolonged "Hoo-oo-oo," which was quickly answered by the appearance at the shanty door of a little figure in a blue calico gown, that trotted up to the gate to greet me, followed by the whole outfit of dogs.

For it was a peculiarity of this dear little thing that she never walked, not even in the house had she been known to do so, but ran from room to room, from table to cupboard, as if she could not leave you for long or feed you sufficiently.

It was always, certainly for me, and I think I may say for us both, a red-letter day when we met, and I was welcomed with delight, and told that dinner was just ready.

Dinner at E.'s was always a festival. No one knows the delight of sitting down to a meal you have not cooked or prepared until one has had the joy of providing three hundred and sixty-five dinners per annum, to say nothing of the same number of breakfasts and suppers.

Even the everlasting beef tasted nicer than it did at home, and I nearly finished a jar of sweet pickles, which were got out for my especial benefit. The meal was soon over and quickly cleared away; there were only our two selves and the Boss, the boys of the establishment being out with ours, working at the

irrigation ditch, which belonged jointly to three ranches, each having the use of the water two days a week, the Boss having first call on it.

So after dinner he rode off to look up the boys, and dear E., always mindful of others, called out to him to bring my boys back to supper as well. My eyes brightened at the idea. I should ride home in the waggon then, and not have to take a tie pass that afternoon!

"But we shall be so many," I represented, much against my secret wishes.

"And the more the merrier," she laughed. "There's a fresh ham in cut, and with that and the beef I guess we'll 'pan out' all right." Of course I was only too delighted, and as she went to get the letters she tossed a small pound package into my lap, and said: "Guess what that is? I can tell you, what with home letters and that, we will have a celebration this afternoon."

I pinched the little packet right and left.

"Rice, rolled oats?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Smell it, child, smell it," and I did so.

"Oh, oh!" I cried with joy, "what a treat! It's tea, and not—not uncoloured Japan."

"English breakfast tea," she replied.

"Yes, I know it's an extravagance, but for once in a way we will have a cup of afternoon tea just as if we were at home, and hang the expense! Here's the home mail!"

How we enjoyed that pot of tea; and how many cups we drank; and how we read and reread our letters, and then exchanged them, till I knew as much of a certain rectory in Sussex and the people in it as she did of my own home! And we had a lovely talk over them all that was yet a little tinged with melancholy.

For we seemed to hold our home-treasures on such uncertain tenure. The very letters lying in our laps were over three weeks old; and what might not have happened in a month?

But it would never do for the boys to return and find us dissolved in sentiment and tears; both men and women had to work in the States, and leave the weeping to take care of itself. There were the chickens to feed and shut up from the grip of the wily coyote, the fire to make up, and supper to lay. Then, as we knew the menfolk had had a hard day's



work and would be extra tired, we milked, and put some "chop" ready for the horses, then did up our hair, which, truth to tell, had got a little untidy whilst doing the chores, and were ready for the boys. It all seemed so easily done by the two of us. I often think that instead of ranching in solitary state English people should combine and live in small communities of, say, half-a-dozen families, sharing expenses and receipts. It would certainly be pleasanter for the men, and lighten the women's work considerably. It made it very hard lines when one felt ill, and yet had to keep about because there was only yourself to do things. I said something of the kind to E. But that astute little woman shook her head.

"All very well, Mollie, if they got on like we do; but suppose the petticoats took to quarrelling, and then there would be a nice kettle of fish in your small Arcadia! If life in community is ever to succeed with English people, allowance must be made for a certain amount of exclusiveness; and how are you to obtain that in a wooden shanty?"

I could not answer, and I suppose it would not be possible; but I wish some people would try it for a year, and give the world the benefit of their experience. Then every one could take, also, the work they were best suited to, and I would so have loved to only have had cooking and baking to attend to. I did hate washing and getting up starched things; indeed, I could never do them properly.

By the time E. and I had discussed our new Social Republic the two waggons had arrived, the Boss and Jack heading the procession on horseback.

In a moment the sleepy shanty awoke to life. We each of us cast a glance at the looking-glass—at least, I know I did, and I caught E. at it—to see if our hair was tidy, and then we ran out to meet the outfit.

They all seemed very jolly and ready for their supper, thankful also to find the chores done for them, and we sat down to supper with true Western appetites.

This was always the pleasantest hour of the twenty-four, the work was all done, and the night and its rest before us; after supper the boys helped wash up, and then we went into the parlour, where five pipes were soon in full blast, and E. and I listened and told of the day's doings. There was always something strange or funny to be told; life was full of surprises in this won-

derful new country with its Old World customs. A young country is usually a hopeful one, its faults very often virtues in their infancy, its wild intolerance even is a fault on the right side, for the universal tolerance which communities, like people, gain as they grow older, is sometimes only another name for universal indifference. Above all, this evening there was the home mail; and the papers and magazines, which were such a godsend, and which were lent over and over again all round the Creek. Then E. and I made arrangements to join the boys in the ditch for a picnic the next day, and then it was time to depart.

So we drove off at last; the waggon was guiltless of springs and I got a good jolting, particularly when we raced up and down the many "wash-outs" on the prairie road; but I did not mind them one little bit, being only too thankful to be spared taking a tie pass again that day.

#### PRISON POETRY.

HOWEVER much the bodily movements of men may be limited, and their freedom of action restricted by imprisonment, it but little affects the freedom of their mind. Adversity and confinement may for a time depress the mental faculties, but they cannot entirely deprive a genius of his power, or rob any man of his thinking capacity.

Nothing more strongly corroborates this fact than the innumerable outpourings, both prose and poetical, which have been produced by men and women during their days of imprisonment. The prolific productions of prisoners amply attest the truth of the poet's lines:

Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for a hermitage.

On the subject of whether prisoners may be considered innocent we do not enlarge, but it is a fact, whether innocent or otherwise, "the mind is its own place," and never can be fettered but by narrow notions, bigotry, and prejudices.

It is not difficult to find an explanation for the production of so much prison literature. Not unfrequently the prisoner is left with nothing to occupy his attention but the fancies of his imagination, and the stern facts of his solitary surroundings. To minds which must think, such a condition is the very mine of ideas, for it is in solitude

that thought is born and nurtured. In this way, for lack of other occupation, many have been led, during their days of incarceration, to while away the time in writing down their thoughts. Some not privileged with the conveniences of paper, pens, and ink, have scratched upon their prison walls the ideas which rose before their minds and found expression in words. Who can tell; but for the solitude of the prison life of Bunyan, the world might never have possessed that most priceless of prison productions, the "Pilgrim's Progress."

Prison literature in general is too wide a subject to deal with in a short sketch such as the present; we shall therefore confine our remarks to "Prison Poetry."

Much of the matter which is classed under this category is certainly but little worthy of the title of poetry, being merely doggerel, and some of that the crudest possible, but the term is used in its general sense, including anything in the form of rhyme.

When Bunyan wrote his "Pilgrim's Progress" he penned for it a poetical preface, which we are quite justified in classing as a prison poem. It is usually found prefixed to the various editions of his work, and is called "The Author's Apology for His Book." In it he somewhat corroborates the sentiments already expressed, that, when writing is resorted to in prison, it is for lack of something other to do. He says:

I did not think  
To show to all the world my pen and ink  
In such a mode; I only thought to make  
I knew not what; nor did I undertake  
Thereby to please my neighbour; no, not I;  
I did it my own self to gratify.

Queen Elizabeth, while undergoing imprisonment at the hands of her sister Mary, occupied much of her time in writing poetical places. The lines which she then wrote are judged to be far superior to any of her poems written at other times.

Mary Queen of Scots, in her imprisonment, penned much poetry of exceeding great beauty. Her "Last Prayer," which was originally written in Latin, possesses a particularly sweet, pathetic, and plaintive tone, which is most appropriate to the words:

Oh! my God and my Lord,  
I have trusted in Thee;  
Oh! Jesus, my Love,  
Now liberate me.  
In my enemies' power,  
In affliction's sad hour,  
I languish for Thee.

In sorrowing, weeping,  
And bending the knee,  
I adore and implore Thee  
To liberate me!

James the First of Scotland was another Royal prisoner who whiled away the hours of his solitude by writing poetry. His poem, "The King's Quhair" (The King's Book) is one of the most widely known poetical productions of any sovereign. The original MS., which consists of nearly one thousand four hundred lines, is still carefully imprisoned among the many treasures of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Sir William Davenant, while imprisoned in the Isle of Wight in 1649, wrote the greater part of his now almost forgotten poem, "Gondibert." From the history of foreign countries many examples might be given of the poetical productions of prisoners. One of the most prominent is that of Silvio Pellico, the Italian littérateur, who wrote some of his finest pieces in the seclusion of his prison.

But all the prison poetry of which there is a record has not been pondered over and produced by such illustrious prisoners as those already named. Probably the mass of prison poetry which has been written on stools and bed-posts, and scratched on prison walls, far exceeds that which has found expression on paper, and many a "mute, inglorious Milton" has begun and finished his poetical career with these "lost to sight" productions.

There is in existence a short poem, said to have been scratched by a maniac on the wall of his cell, which runs thus:

Could I with ink the ocean fill,  
Were all the world of parchment made,  
Were every reed on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God alone  
Would drain that ocean dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole  
Though stretched from sky to sky.

The authenticity of this being the work of a maniac has often been questioned, because of the beauty of its expression and its sound reason, but the story stands.

As might be expected the effusions of gaol and penitentiary prisoners are of a much more humorous tendency than the foregoing. However, even in gaol may be found, here and there, in out-of-the-way places, snatches of poetry not entirely void of pathos and sometimes power. There must have been something of the moralist in the prisoner who wrote the lines:

Vain regrets did never yet amend  
Our past offences.  
Who wrongly acts must face the facts,  
And bear the consequences.

In the "Prison Diary" of Michael Davitt we find a record of his discovery of a poetical effusion, inscribed on the bottom of a dinner-pail, which runs thus :

Millbank for thick shins  
And graft at the pump ;  
Broadmoor for all lags  
As go off their chump ;  
Brixton for good toke and  
Cocoa with fat ;  
Dartmoor for bad grub, but  
Plenty of chat ;  
Portsmouth, a blooming  
Bad place for hard work ;  
Chatham on Sunday gives  
Four ounces of pork ;  
Portland is worst of the lot  
For to joke in ;  
For fetching a lagging  
There's no place like Woking.

To one unacquainted with the prison vocabulary, in this instance a glossary would be of decided advantage. Some one, evidently with a personal knowledge of the ways of prison life and language, has realised this necessity, and has supplied the meaning of some of the most obscure phrases as follows :

"Thick shins" means good food ;  
"graft at the pump," work at the cranks, sometimes called "grinding the wind" ; a  
"lag" is one who is not in penitentiary in contradistinction to one who is sent to the House of Detention ; "toke" is bread ; "fetching a lagging" means having an easy time of it ; "Woking" is the "sick prison." Not unfrequently the subject on which the muse delights to inspire the imprisoned "poet" is the "grub," which accordingly receives varied treatment at his hands. For instance :

I had for my dinner, ochone, ochone,  
One ounce of mutton and three ounce of bone.

One more month then out we go,  
Then for feed of hot coco,  
Fried bread and stick, plenty of beer,  
Better luck than we get here.

Cheer up, boys, down with sorrow,  
Beef to-day, soup to-morrow.

To the prisoner, prison life must in itself contain little that is poetical, and yet if he possesses that spirit of finding "sermons in stones," he will be able to impart even to such prosaic life, "Thoughts which do lie too deep for tears."

This power is beautifully displayed in the case of Sir Roger L'Estrange, who lay in prison for nearly four years, for espousing the Royalist cause during the Civil War. While in prison he wrote a poem entitled, "The History of the Imprisoned Royalists." In it these verses occur, which exhibit the freedom of mind he possessed, and the

power of making things poetical even in prison :

That which the world miscalls a gaol  
A private closet is to me,  
Whilst a good conscience is my bail,  
And innocence my liberty.  
Locks, bars, walls, leanness, though together  
met,  
Make me no prisoner, but an anchorite.  
My soul is free as ambient air,  
Although my baser parts be mewed ;  
Whilst loyal thoughts do still repair  
To company my solitude ;  
And though rebellion may my body bind,  
My King can only captivate my mind.  
Have you not seen the nightingale,  
A pilgrim cooped into a cage,  
And heard her tell her wonted tale  
In that her narrow hermitage ?  
Even then her charming melody doth prove  
That all her bars are trees, her cage a grove.  
I am the bird whom they combine  
Thus to deprive of liberty ;  
But though they do my corpse confine,  
Yet, maugre hate, my soul is free ;  
And though I'm mewed, yet I can chirp and  
sing  
Disgrace to rebels, glory to my King !

## MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Alexia," "Red Towers," "The Little One," etc.

### CHAPTER XXXV. AT THE LAST MOMENT.

ARTHUR and Poppy, when their elders left them alone that afternoon in the garden, did not at first find much to say to each other. For some time they sat in the shade of the old cedar, hardly speaking. Arthur seemed to be lost in thought, while a kind of shyness had fallen over Poppy ; with drooping eyelashes she gazed across the shadowed grass, and a very slight but happy smile just curled her lips, giving her whole expression a sweetness which it sometimes wanted.

"What are you thinking of, dear ?" said Arthur suddenly.

She lifted her head and their eyes met. The look that he gave her was perhaps a curious one. The eyes of Poppy's lover, who was to marry her the next day, expressed admiration, kindness, a certain interest, a certain content, a little excitement, a little self-pity and resignation. Poppy could not read all this ; such a variety of silent speech would have been beyond her, even if she had been clever in interpreting looks. She only understood the kindness and the admiration ; the rest was a blank ; but for the first time since she had known Arthur,

she was aware of that blank. Not that she told herself so; the feeling that unconsciously chilled the air and spoiled her smile was of the vaguest, most instinctive kind. What caused it? In another moment she knew. Love had looked at her from other eyes, and henceforth no imitation could pass muster. Poor Geoffrey's look had haunted her all through these months, and now it returned to her so vividly that under Arthur's gentle glance her eyes fell, and the colour mounted in her pale face. Arthur, of course, only partly understood her. He knew she loved him, and he never thought that it could possibly occur to her, this simple-minded, devoted woman, to be at all dissatisfied with what she had in return.

"Poppy, I'm not good enough for you," he said, half in play. "Tell me, what are you thinking about? Why do you look like that, dear?"

"We belong to each other," she said, very low. She was answering herself rather than Arthur, and did not really know what she meant by the words. "Just now I was thinking of Saint Carolus—and——"

"Sitting under a fir-tree? Poppy, are you sure you don't regret it?" he said, smiling and dropping his eyes.

"Regret it? How could I?"

"Well, dear—you might, you know."

"Do you, Arthur?"

"What silly questions! Give me your hand."

He took it in his own, leaning forward to look at it, so that her eyes rested on his fair, bent head, white brow, and sleepy eyelids lowered. She said in the depths of her heart:

"Men are not all alike. Arthur is a perfect kind of man—civilised. Men like him don't show all they feel." She looked at her hand as it lay in his, thinking:

"Yes, it is at home in its right place—happy thing!" and the smile that had fled came back to her. She wished a little that Arthur would kiss her, but he seemed quite contented to sit there looking at her hand.

"I suppose you know, Poppy, that you have the prettiest hands in the world?" he said presently.

There was no dishonesty in this, for in truth he only spoke what would have been most people's opinion. Poppy's hands were long, narrow, white, and delicate; the fingers long and inclined to be pointed,

but yet not tapering to weakness, as the fingers of women of her kind often do. They were not clever or capable hands, but they were not without character; and a little more of that would have made them less pretty.

Arthur held the hand and admired it. He really admired it, as he admired Poppy herself, and all her characteristics. But a comparison existed in his mind. With eyes bent down and gentle touch, he might have been a polite acquaintance studying the shape, the lines, the soft tints of what he was allowed to hold. He was thinking of another hand, smaller, shorter, squarer, browner, yet delicate in its own way; a hand which had no ancestors to boast of, but possessed capacities of its own, and a kind of character quite outside the sphere of old English breeding. Some men might have been led by one type, some by the other.

It was really too startling that Poppy, after a few minutes of this gentle philandering, said suddenly:

"Arthur, before Aunt Fan comes back, would you very much mind going with me to Church Corner?"

For a moment Arthur did not look up or reply. It seemed really almost hard that his good resolutions should be tried in this way. It would be bad enough, he knew, to see Maggie in church the next day, each of them being married to somebody else; but then he would be so well guarded from himself that no mischief could come of it. Perhaps, even to-day, there could not be much danger. In Poppy's presence they could hardly even look at each other, much less speak freely. He had given his word to his mother, and he quite meant to keep it; yet at Poppy's words there surged up in his heart an irresistible wish to see Maggie again, even to be in the same room with her for ten minutes. Perhaps she had forgotten him, and made herself contented with that dull fellow she had promised to marry. It would be interesting to know. Arthur told himself he only wished—feeling like a rather heroic victim of circumstances—that he could have managed as easily to forget her.

He made one small effort in what seemed to be the right direction.

"Must we?" he murmured. "It is so awfully jolly here!"

The light flashed up in his brown eyes as he raised them once more to Poppy's face; she thought it was for her, and



smiled happily as she drew away her hand.

"Yes—but I don't want to feel unkind," she said. "They say that the old man can't live very long, and—don't you understand, dear?—I would rather not go away without seeing him again. And Maggie—poor child——"

"Why do you pity her?" Arthur said, looking down.

"Oh, I don't know—yes, I do. I don't think she is quite as happy as I am."

"It is so difficult to know about that, isn't it?" he said softly. "Anyhow, Thorne is a good fellow—a better man than I am, Poppy."

She made no answer in words, but laid her hand on his again with a quick, caressing touch. He caught it and raised it to his lips.

"Poppy," he said, "I tell you again, you are fifty thousand times too good for me."

"Nonsense!" she said. Then she rose up, saying: "Come!" and it seemed that he could only obey.

They strolled slowly down the lawn, through the bright budding wood, and out into the green lane beyond. Arthur had soon hardened himself to the inevitable, and now he talked lightly and cheerfully. They were both laughing, and he lingered a moment over the fastening of the wood gate, when footsteps came hurrying up the lane, and a man dashed past them, hurriedly taking off his hat as he went. He was gone so quickly that Poppy hardly saw him, but Arthur, who faced him, had met a glance from dark, angry eyes which made him colour and frown.

"Was it Mr. Thorne?" said Poppy, bewildered.

"Yes. Did you see his face?" said Arthur with a slight laugh. "He looked more like murder than marriage. I hope he won't shoot anybody in church to-morrow—me, for instance."

"Why should he shoot you?" Poppy exclaimed; and then she stopped, flushing painfully.

Arthur laughed again; he was too conscious of his own false step to notice hers.

"He looked as if he might be fresh from a quarrel—rather angry with any one who happened to be in a better temper than himself."

"A quarrel! I hope not," Poppy said faintly. "And yet if—if they don't care enough for each other—as I have feared

sometimes—it would be better to find it out now than next week."

"Why, it would be too late now. Fancy breaking off your engagement not twenty-four hours before your marriage! Not possible."

"Oh, yes, quite possible. Much better than to marry and then be unhappy for ever."

"But don't you think it would be dishonourable?"

He was staring at her in a kind of astonishment.

"Dishonourable!" she repeated.

"Yes, dear, dishonourable. Most people would think it so. You yourself would never treat a man so."

"I! Oh, of course not. One doesn't think of one's self. No doubt you are right. Only if two people find out their mistake just in time, are they really bound to it for ever?"

"Two people are so seldom convinced in the same way," said Arthur slowly. "Such a breaking-off nearly always means an awful upset for one or the other. Seriously, though, about these—about her and Thorne—do you think they——"

"I have no reason," Poppy said decidedly. "I dare say it is all right; something may have annoyed Mr. Thorne. Please ring the bell."

To her surprise, the maid said that Mr. Farrant was downstairs, and took them straight into the south parlour, where in a flood of sunshine, almost extinguishing a small yellow fire, the old man sat in his usual chair. His beard and hair looked wild; he seemed restless and strange, and his speech was a good deal affected, so that Arthur could hardly understand the hurried words with which he received them. Poppy, knowing him better, was a good deal touched by a welcome which seemed quite to ignore any change or coldness in the last few months. She made out that he was glad to see her once more as Miss Latimer, glad to see Captain Nugent, glad that in their happiness they had remembered a poor failing old man. He was, in fact, ready to take a bright view of everything. He began reminding her of a talk they had had in the autumn, when he first suggested to her that Maggie might marry Geoffrey Thorne. He did not remind her of his unkind words about Arthur on the same occasion—perhaps he had forgotten them.

"And by this time to-morrow it will be all over, all over," he repeated several times.

"And he is a good fellow, Miss Latimer. I'm ready to trust him with my little girl. He's going to take her away for a fortnight, you know—we can't afford wedding trips like some people—and Miss Thorne is going to look after me. She's a good soul, though, to tell you the truth, she frightens the young men out of their senses. But they're mistaken; she would make a better wife than two-thirds of these girls you see about. Well, Maggie will have a change, and she wants it. She is not looking well, Miss Latimer. I wish she could have been married before, but it was put off to please you, I understand."

Poppy listened patiently to these and further wanderings. At last she managed to say: "Where is Maggie, Mr. Farrant?"

"Maggie is in the garden with her young man," he answered. "She has been gone a long time—too long, too long. Captain Nugent, will you oblige me by stepping through that window? You will find Maggie, and bring her in to see Miss Latimer."

Arthur hesitated. But he and Poppy both knew that Geoffrey Thorne was no longer there; and thus Poppy, at least, saw no reason why he should not obey the old man's wish. One of Mr. Farrant's thin hands was nervously stretching towards Poppy, and his eager eyes were fixed upon her. Strangely enough she had a feeling that she would never see him again, and that he wished for a few words alone with her. She made Arthur a sign with her head. He rose, still looking at her with doubtful eyes; but it seemed that fate was driving him. He slowly crossed the room, let himself out of the window, went down the steps, down the long strip of lawn, and disappeared among the trees in the lower part of the garden.

In obedience to the old man's eager signs, Poppy drew her chair nearer to him, and with distracted ears, in her anxiety about Maggie, found herself listening to the particulars of his will, as well as of the settlement he had made on Maggie. He had arranged all that with Geoffrey's father—"a sharp man, my dear," he chuckled, "a good man of business, I can tell you; but we understand each other, and you may take my word for it, the arrangements are as fair as we knew how to make 'em. Have you seen Maggie's wedding-dress? How much do you think it cost, now?"

Thus the minutes rolled on, all too short for the old man and his confidences, but

very long and slow for the fair young woman who sat beside him with one hand on the arm of his chair, trying to listen, trying to answer, with all the loyal courtesy that belonged to her, yet watching the window and the garden with a puzzled uneasiness that deepened with every ticking stroke of the old clock in the corner.

Arthur, going quietly down among the trees, had soon found Maggie. She was sitting on a grass bank, her face hidden, sobbing and crying despairingly, as if all the grief in the world was hers. He walked so lightly on the grass that she did not hear him coming, and she did not know that he was there till he knelt suddenly down beside her, forgetting everything else in the world, and gently drew away the hands that were hiding her tearful eyes. Maggie gave a little start and cry, but escape, even if she had wished it, was out of the question, and the next instant her dark curly head was lying on his shoulder. The birds sang happily, and the soft May wind rustled the trees, while Arthur comforted her.

At the end of half an hour he came back to Mr. Farrant and Poppy, very pale, his eyes shining, and with a strangeness, almost solemnity, in his manner, which filled Poppy with an extraordinary new terror of she knew not what. He gave her no choice as to what she was to do. He walked straight up to the old man and held out his hand.

"Well, sir, where's my little girl?" said Mr. Farrant, staring at him.

"She is not to be found, sir," Arthur answered calmly. "She will be in by-and-by, no doubt. Shall we go?" he said to Poppy.

Somehow his manner paralysed her, and she could only follow his lead.

"What is it, Arthur? You must tell me," she whispered, as soon as they had escaped into the passage. "You did find her, I'm sure. Is she ill? Is she dead? I must go to her."

"No, you must not," he said. "She is neither ill nor dead. Come home now with me. There is something I must tell you."

Even then there flowed over Poppy the first wave of a new, indescribable feeling, utterly unknown to her single-minded nature—the feeling of living in a world of mere phantoms, mere appearances, with

nothing real, with no such thing as a consistent human character. For this man who walked beside her up the lane and through the wood was not Arthur Nugent, the man she knew so well, the man she loved and was to marry to-morrow. It was somebody quite hard and strong, his will roused to such violent life that she instinctively felt it to be irresistible, and dared not even—Poppy, with all her own stately independence—break the silence which he chose to keep till he was ready to speak to her.

She went with this strange man—Arthur with some other man's fierceness and strength instead of his own pleasant and easy gentleness—walking as if in a dream, through the familiar paths, led by him where he chose to go, till they came out of the wood at the corner nearest the garden.

Not far up the lawn there was a lonely seat, half in the hollow of an old tree, which had been struck by lightning years ago, but was now clothed with ivy and honeysuckle. They were trained to make a kind of little arbour, and Poppy used to play there when she was a child. Now tree and arbour and all are gone; they were cleared away by Miss Latimer's orders in the autumn of that year, much to the surprise of the gardener.

If Arthur wished to escape interruption he could not have chosen a better place; for it was out of sight of the windows, no path passed near, and the view was of green slopes of lawn shelving away into the outskirts of the wood. Poppy sat down and looked at him; she could not have walked much farther, for her bodily and mental powers seemed alike to be failing in this extraordinary suspense. He stood in front of her, looking on the ground. After the strained silence had lasted a minute longer, he said abruptly:

"There is something I must lay before you—and you must decide."

Was this her lover? She stretched out both her hands to him in a first and last appeal. Her eyes were more eloquent than her lips, which could hardly pronounce his name; but he did not—perhaps he dared not—look at her.

"It is a queer thing that you should have said that," he went on in a low, sullen tone, as if he was repeating a lesson; "I mean that about breaking off at the last moment. Do you remember? You said that it was better than to marry and then be unhappy for ever."

"Has Maggie—?" Poppy murmured, almost conscious of a feeling of relief.

But no! if Maggie had jilted Geoffrey Thorne, what was it to Arthur that she should be told in this fashion? And what was he saying now?

"I am bound to you. I don't deny it. I am in your hands. But if you marry me it shall be with your eyes open. That is only fair to you, especially after what you said. I don't want to excuse myself in any way—though perhaps I might, if you knew all. I came down here engaged to you. I won't say much about our engagement. But it is the truth that you and I were both dragged into it by our relations. I don't mean quite unwillingly——"

Poppy made a slight movement. Arthur lifted his eyes and met a look that brought him partly to his senses. He blushed to the roots of his hair.

"I'm honest with you at last," he went on after an awful pause. "I must tell you all. We have cared for each other—she and I—ever since we first met. When she accepted that fellow, the poor child thought it was the best thing to do—had some notion of being safe, I suppose. Unfortunately people got to know about it; and you can imagine that my mother bullied me. It was because of that, more than my health, that she took me off to the south. But I need not go on explaining; your aunt can tell you all. Now do you see we are in your hands? She almost told that man to-day she would not marry him. And in any case she won't. But you must decide for me."

Poppy leaned back in a corner of the seat. Her heart was beating heavily, and her brain seemed to swim. She heard all that Arthur said, and understood it in a way; but the things heaped upon her seemed almost too much to be borne all at once. People had known—her aunt had known—every one but herself had known. Yet they were all rejoicing at her marriage with this man. It was not only the ideal Arthur who had disappeared, but among her friends and relations faithfulness did not exist. Death could not be worse than such an experience, Poppy dimly thought as she sat there. Pale, grave, statue-like, her thick lashes lowered, she had not a look or a word for Arthur; and as he stood before her, his shadow lay between her and all the world. What a shipwreck! what months of deception—not only self-

deception, but a long fraud practised by all who were near to her!

Arthur saw that the shock was very great, and he was unfeignedly sorry, for his admiration and liking for Poppy were real. Still a good deal of impatience was mixed with his sorrow, for he was thinking more of Maggie than of her, and half his brain was busily occupied in planning the future. As for his own unfortunate part in the business, he laid all that at his mother's door. She had forced him into this engagement, she had pressed on the marriage in spite of everything, and she would have no right to be surprised if he ended in what she would think ruin. He felt that he was cutting a most deplorable figure, that his present course was almost as dishonourable as if he had run away with Maggie from her grandfather's garden without a word to anybody. However, in his present state of mind, he was quite willing to be cut by the whole world for Maggie's sake. He was over head and ears in love, and poor Poppy was only an obstacle. He was so much in love that, though a tolerably worldly young man, he had not one thought or regret to spare for the fortune, the position, the beautiful old Court, all that at this last moment he was so resolutely leaving behind him.

"Please answer me!" he said, after a few minutes, clenching his two hands with impatience.

It seemed to him that there was nothing more to be said, and that even to ask Poppy's forgiveness would almost be insulting her. It was still more impossible to express the grief he really felt, and therefore, the sooner this painful interview was ended, the better for them both.

"What?" Poppy murmured vaguely.

He came a step nearer, setting his teeth; the strain was almost unbearable.

"Don't you understand? Do you still wish to—go through this ceremony to-morrow? If you do, of course I am at your service. If not, will you set me free from my engagement?"

His bright, impatient eyes were fixed upon her; the tone of his voice sounded almost brutal in her ears. He could not, certainly, have put his question more baldly; and it had its effect; it roused Poppy as the touch of hot iron or the prick of a dagger might have done. Her pale face flamed with colour suddenly, and her soft eyes flashed fire; he had never seen them so beautiful before. His own fell before them; and however exalted by thoughts of Maggie, he felt at that moment rather like a beaten dog.

She was standing up now; he was conscious that she had taken his ring from her finger, and thrown it on the grass at his feet. Then she moved a few steps away; then turned half round and said to him over her shoulder:

"You are free. You have done right—I am obliged to you."

It was the tone and air of a prince's speaking to the most degraded of men; but it did not make Arthur angry. As she walked away he even followed her a few steps, muttering, "Poppy, forgive me." But she did not turn, or look, or answer; and he stood still in the shadow, gazing after her as she went, till she was hidden by an advancing line of trees.

Arthur picked up the discarded ring, drew a long breath, and muttering "That's over!" started off in a great hurry down the lawn and through the friendly shades of the wood.

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